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MISASSIGNMENT OF TEACHERS IN OREGON, A STUDY COMMISSIONED BY
THE TEACHER STANDARDS AND PRACTICES COMMISSION OF THE STATE
OF OREGON.

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A STUDY OF 1966-1967 OREGON SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS
REVEALED THAT TEACHER ASSIGNMENTS WERE GENERALLY IN ACCORD
WITH THEIR PREPARATION. FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS WERE MADE BASED
ON STUDY FINDINGS AND RELATED RESEARCH--(1) A MORE
STANDARDIZED DEFINITION OF TEACHER PREPARATION SHOULD BE
ADOPTED, (2) A UNIFORM AND USABLE RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEM ON
TEACHER PREPARATION SHOULD BE ADOPTED, (3) THE PROFESSION
ITSELF SHOULD DECIDE WHETHER MISASSIGNMENT IS REALLY A
PROBLEM, AND (4) A LARGER STUDY WHICH ENGAGES THE MAJOR
SOURCE OF DATA ABOUT MISASSIGNMENT OF TEACHERS SHOULD BE
CONDUCTED. (HW)

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School of Education
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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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Any judgment or interpretation is reserved to the writer.

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INTRODUCTION

"Misassignment" is a sticky word. To use the word in connection with the word "teacher" implies that there is a universally agreed upon opinion about effective teaching--another sticky notion. Nevertheless, the problem of a misassigned teacher seems to be a glaring one today.¹

Probably more myth than reality abounds regarding the seriousness or non-seriousness of this problem. For example, there are answers to the following questions. How do you define "misassignment"? Are "misassigned teachers" less effective than other teachers? Often, the answers to these questions differ, perhaps for many reasons. The present study encountered this difficulty. In interests of expediency, both questions were ignored under the assumption that a determination of misassignment is most appropriately left to the profession.

The problem of the misassignment of teachers is a major concern of the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission. As it was initially stated, the problem was "to study the assignment of Oregon secondary school teachers in grades 7-12 for the year 1966-67 to determine whether their assignments are in accordance with their preparation." Thus, this study.

¹The National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards (NCTEPS) prepared a report based on a nationwide study on teachers in 1965.

SOME STUDIES OF MISASSIGNED TEACHERS

A number of studies of misassignment have been made in the past. For background purposes of this report, however, only the two most pertinent ones will be reviewed. Perhaps the largest study of misassigned teachers was that undertaken by NCTEPS. The committee decided early that local state action and good ideas to improve assignment procedures were needed more than statistics. They chose not to collect statistics about the incidence of misassignment but rather to find out how representatives of various groups of educators feel about the problem and to provide specific tools for those who want to change the status quo.

In this pivotal study, the purposes of the questionnaire survey were:

- (1) to see if educators consider the misassignment of teachers a critical problem which limits the quality of American public education;
- (2) to find out what characteristics of beginning and experienced elementary and secondary teachers should most affect their teaching assignments;
- (3) to solicit opinions concerning the individual or agency that should have principal responsibility for insuring proper teacher assignment;
- (4) to describe the incidence, settings, causes, and corrective practices relating to teacher misassignment;
- (5) to investigate practices which promise to insure appropriate assignment;
- (6) to identify studies relating to assignment.

To achieve these purposes the committee circulated a questionnaire among a selected sample of educators throughout the United States. Of 1,716 questionnaires distributed, 1,035, or 60 percent were returned. Educators from every state were included. Those considered were:

- (1) state education department officials;
- (2) state directors of teacher education and certification;

- (3) subject specialists;
- (4) state TEPS commission representatives;
- (5) deans and directors of teacher education;
- (6) school superintendents;
- (7) elementary and secondary school classroom teachers;
- (8) secondary school principals;
- (9) elementary school principals;
- (10) college placement officers;
- (11) school personnel administrators.

Most of the examples of misassignment fell into one or a combination of the following categories:

- A. Matter competence appropriate to the grade level and/or subject taught (59 percent of the examples).
- B. Teaching methods appropriate to the grade level and/or subject taught (25 percent of the examples).
- C. The ability to discipline students (4 percent of the examples).
- D. The ability to understand students (3 percent of the examples).
- E. The ability to understand the values of the specific socio-economic group from which his student came (3 percent of the examples).
- F. Physiological and/or psychological strength (3 percent of the examples).
- G. The ability to cooperate with administrators and peers (1 percent of the examples).

Category A was considered alone; B-E together; and F-G together. Thus, a tentative description of a proper assignment might be: A proper assignment is one in which the teacher's education in subject matter and methodology, his experience, and his physical and psychological condition are appropriate for maximum

effectiveness in his teaching situation. Misassignment constitutes a violation of any of the conditions of proper assignment.

Of the 677 cases noted, 45 percent involved misassignments in rural communities, 25 percent urban and 28 percent suburban; 53 percent took place in grades 10-12, 19 percent in grades 7-9, and 27 percent in grades 1-6.

The analysis of misassignment in rural schools indicated that, in the majority of the cases, misassignment was deliberately made by an administrator either because he could not recruit the type of teacher required or because the academic program of the school was broad, served a small population, and thus required one or more teachers to work outside their respective fields of preparation. The most frequent cause of misassignment in both urban and suburban schools is the inadequate supply of certain types of secondary school teachers. This is especially true in regard to the supply and demand for science, mathematics, English, and foreign language teachers. The second most frequent form of misassignment is caused by late resignations and school-year resignations. The third most frequent type of misassignment seems to be the result of inadequate evaluation of a candidate's credentials by an administrator. Political pressures exerted by teachers on administrators and the seniority system seem to account for a small percentage of the total misassignments reported in urban and suburban school systems.

Respondents indicated that corrective action in cases of misassignment occurs much less frequently in rural and small-town schools than in urban-suburban systems. Where correction does take place, it is not generally the result of internal pressures from parents, a principal, or a superintendent. Rather, it is forced by a state accrediting agency. In urban-suburban school districts, misassignments are seldom allowed to extend more than a year. Moreover, correction is most often a result of action taken by the local district at its own initiative.

Educators indicated that state certification laws and their enforcement by state departments of education do help to insure that the subject matter preparation and background in methodology are appropriate to a teacher's assignment. The second most frequently listed organization whose work helped to prevent misassignment was some form of professional education association. Responses indicated that colleges and universities also have considerable influence in encouraging proper assignment.

Conclusions based on responses to the questionnaire were as follows:

Educators surveyed do consider the misassignment of teachers a problem which limits the quality of education in the public schools. But they do not see it as being as crucial a limiting factor as the failure to attract an adequate number of academically and personally talented young people to teacher education programs, excessive class size, low salaries for career teachers, or inadequate assistance for new teachers.

Educators emphasize the need for state departments of education to continue to enforce certification requirements if misassignments are to be avoided. They do not rate "overly prescriptive certification requirements" as a factor which limits quality education.

There is general agreement among educators concerning the teacher characteristics which should most influence the assignment of beginning and experienced elementary and secondary school teachers. For elementary school teachers, experience, personality, and general education are the characteristics believed to count most. For secondary school teachers, experience, subject matter preparation, and personality are the most important characteristics according to the respondents.

There are contradictory opinions regarding the individuals or agencies that have or should have responsibility for insuring appropriate assignment. In Question 3, educators ranked school principals and superintendents as having the main responsibility for insuring appropriate assignment; state departments of education ranked fourth. In response to Questions 4 and 5, educators favored state departments of education as the agencies with the prime responsibility for insuring appropriate assignment.

Misassignment occurs in every type of geographical and educational setting. It is more common in rural schools than in urban or suburban schools. Generally, beginning teachers are misassigned just as frequently as are experienced teachers. Misassignments occur most frequently in rural, urban, and suburban secondary schools as the result of an inadequate supply of certain types of teachers.

Educators in rural schools are far less apt to correct misassignments promptly than are educators in urban-suburban communities.

The consolidation of rural school districts and small school systems may reduce the number of misassignments now prevalent in these schools.

The incidence of misassignment and its correction varies from one state to another.

The practices which, according to the educators surveyed, appear to hold the most promise for insuring appropriate teacher assignment are those initiated by state departments of education and which involve the policing of teacher assignments.

Practices such as team teaching, the use of helping teachers, and the multiple-interview technique are helpful in eliminating the misassignment of beginning teachers.

Recently, educators throughout the country have been concerned about misassignments caused by the assignment of teachers of middle class background to urban and suburban schools attended by large numbers of culturally deprived students. Surprisingly, the educators surveyed made relatively few allusions to this type of misassignment.

Different groups of educators have different perceptions of what factors most limit quality education. The difference in perception among educators may well cause the various groups to work in opposition to each other.

The second study is one written by Peterson² about misassignments in Illinois. In this study the definition of misassignment was considerably narrowed to "the assignment of a teacher to a position for which that teacher was not legally qualified: his or her preparation did not meet Illinois certification requirements for that assignment." A questionnaire was sent to 712 degree-holding persons who were members of the IEA. The return of these questionnaires was 370, or 52 percent. It should be pointed out that the design of this study was quite different from that of the NCTEPS study. The teachers were to complete questionnaires. The fact that teachers are very busy people could explain the return rate. From all the returns only 13 clear-cut cases of misassignments emerged. Some factors behind misassignments were summarized as follows:

² Donald W. Peterson, "Misassignment in Illinois: A Problem?" Illinois Education, Vol. 55, No. 1, September, 1966, pp. 10-11.

- (1) Misassignment occurs much more frequently among men than among women,
- (2) Misassignment seems to be a greater problem in junior high school than in elementary or secondary school,
- (3) Length of time in teaching is related to misassignments--misassignment is rather high in first year teaching and declines steadily through the fifth year but becomes more prevalent after the sixth year.

Misassignment seems to be a problem although it is not very well defined. Many state departments have become interested in the problem since the NCTEPS study in 1965. Of particular importance to this study, however, is the fact that a basic source of data about misassignment--the teachers themselves--seems not to have the time or the inclination to participate in such a study. This fact shaped the present study somewhat.

DESIGN OF THIS STUDY

The research team began by asking two basic questions: Where can an agreeable definition of adequate teacher preparation, not misassignment, be found? And where is the locus of control over assignment of teachers to particular positions in school districts?

There seemed to be no common definition of adequate teacher preparation in the legal sense of the word. For example, many teachers in Oregon have been certified under regulations existing before 1965. And the secondary teachers were certified to teach in secondary schools, with the decision about which subject left to the local superintendent as he assessed the teacher's transcript. At the same time, teachers not fully certified by 1965, had fairly clear guidelines explained in the "Oregon Rules for Certification of Public School Teachers, Educational Specialists, and Administrators" adopted by the State Board of Education, April 21, 1965. This handbook is a major reference of teacher preparation institutions in Oregon.

Thus, it is apparent that amount of preparation deemed adequate had not been standardized, and that control over the decision about where the teacher would be most properly assigned has been diffuse--sometimes made by a local superintendent but other times by the State Department or the teacher training institution.

With these problems in mind, the staff consulted another standard-setting organization, the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools (NWAHS). Through the inspection of an Annual Report prepared by each member school, the association is able to professionalize its membership, and to investigate cases where a teacher does not have the appropriate background for his assignment. In these cases the use of the teacher in that assignment is "questioned" and, if no

justification or action is forthcoming from the school, steps are taken to improve on this particular matter in that school the following year. The use of the Annual Report of the NWAHS, then, enabled the research staff to gain data, using a professionally designed standard of teacher preparation, without taking more time from teachers themselves to complete another questionnaire. The objection could be raised that all of the schools of Oregon are not in the association and thus the sample is "biased." This is probably true, though problematic. An appropriate defense might be that the attempt to gain unbiased data through a rather routine report and with a fixed set of standards rather than the usual self-selection bias from the anticipated and expected low return-rates more than overcomes this objection.

In summary, using the Annual Report for the 1966-67 school year the team examined each member school of the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools. Two particular types of teachers were selected for this study:

- (1) teachers whose work assignments were questioned by the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools in the previous year and who subsequently were identified as "questioned" teachers on the 1966-67 report; and
- (2) other teachers who are atypical in that they are new teachers, interns, or those persons changed from their assignment of last year.

The "questioned" teachers were interpreted to be misassigned, and the other teachers, who were atypical in some way, were grouped and served as a comparison sample. These two types of teachers were investigated and compared on such variables as degree status, area of degree, preparation in education, subjects taught, and number of subjects taught. This summary leads to the presentation of findings.

FINDINGS

One interesting question is, What is the degree status of misassigned teachers? Table 1 has been constructed from reports of the NWASHS to show the distribution of degrees.

Table 1
DEGREE STATUS OF TEACHERS

Highest Degree	<u>Questioned teachers</u>		<u>New teachers, interns and teachers with changed assignments</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No degree	4	2.8	6	1.2
Baccalaureate	100	70.4	342	68.7
Master's degree	33	23.2	144	28.9
Doctorate	--	----	1	0.2
No response	5	3.5	6	1.2
	142		499	

Thus it is seen that most misassigned teachers have at least a baccalaureate degree. Differences between questioned teachers and others are slight, with more post-graduate degrees among the new teachers than those with changed assignments, which could possibly be promotions.

The question then is, In what subject matter areas do these teachers hold their degrees. Table 2 presents some data on the question.

Table 2
DEGREE AREA OF TEACHERS

Area	<u>Questioned Teachers</u>		<u>New teachers, interns, and teachers with changed assignments</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No degree	3	2.1	6	1.2
Arts	44	31.0	163	32.7
Science	67	47.2	225	45.2
Education	11	7.7	65	13.1
Music	3	2.1	8	1.6
Arts of teaching	2	1.4	7	1.4
Guidance	1	0.7	1	.2
Two degrees	2	1.4	4	.8
Fine arts	4	2.8	2	.4
No response	5	3.5	17	3.4
	<u>142</u>		<u>498</u>	

In both groups, the heavy loading of degree areas is in science and arts. Otherwise, there does not seem to be any appreciable difference between the two groups.

How much professional preparation do these teachers have?

Table 3
PREPARATION IN EDUCATION

Number of Quarter Hours	<u>Questioned Teachers</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
100 or more	4	2.9	13	2.7
90 - 99	4	2.9	12	2.5
80 - 89	0	---	10	2.1
70 - 79	3	2.2	31	6.4
60 - 69	8	5.8	29	6.0
50 - 59	18	12.9	62	12.8
40 - 49	21	15.1	90	18.6
30 - 39	44	31.7	135	28.0
20 - 29	29	20.9	74	15.3
10 - 19	2	1.4	9	1.9
0 - 9	6	4.3	18	3.7
	139		483	

An inspection of Table 3 shows that from 20 to 60 quarter hours of preparation in education would cover a large majority of both groups.

Teachers are often assigned to teach more than one subject. In Table 4 are presented data relevant to the main subject taught by the teachers in this sample.

Table 4
MAIN SUBJECT TAUGHT

General Area	Questioned Teachers		Others	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Language arts	32	22.5	120	24.2
Social studies	17	12.0	69	13.9
Mathematics	18	12.7	47	9.5
Science	16	11.3	41	8.3
Foreign language	7	4.9	11	2.2
Business education	6	4.2	24	4.8
Practical arts, health, P.E.	18	12.7	66	13.3
Vocational education	11	7.7	21	4.2
Fine arts and special ed.	6	4.2	33	6.7
Non-teaching assignment	11	7.7	64	12.9
	<u>142</u>		<u>496</u>	

Most misassignment is in the "solid subjects" areas of language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science and in the practical arts, health and P.E. areas.

Another interesting question is, How many sections of the main subject (the subject for which the teachers have most responsibility) are these teachers assigned to teach?

Table 5
NUMBER OF SECTIONS TAUGHT OF MAIN SUBJECT

No. of Sections	Questioned Teachers		Others	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	5	3.5	6	1.2
1	43	30.5	142	29.2
2	51	36.2	113	23.2
3	12	8.5	71	14.6
4	13	9.2	38	7.8
5	9	6.4	60	12.3
6	5	3.5	38	7.8
7	3	2.1	13	2.7
8	0	---	1	0.2
9	0	---	5	1.0
	141		487	

The large majority of these teachers teach two or fewer sections of their main subject. How much preparation do these teachers have in their main subject?

Table 6
PREPARATION IN MAIN SUBJECT TAUGHT

Quarter Hours	<u>Questioned Teachers</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
100 or more	8	5.7	16	3.4
90 - 99	2	1.4	16	3.4
80 - 89	7	5.0	20	4.3
70 - 79	6	4.2	44	9.5
60 - 69	11	7.9	46	9.9
50 - 59	8	5.7	46	9.9
40 - 49	12	8.6	44	9.5
30 - 39	16	11.4	53	11.4
20 - 29	19	13.6	45	9.7
10 - 19	24	17.1	63	13.5
0 - 9	27	19.3	72	15.5
	<u>140</u>		<u>465</u>	

A good many misassigned teachers have less than 40 hours of preparation in their main subject taught. This would seem to be a very small preparation. Perhaps this is the basis upon which their assignment has been "questioned."

Teachers are prepared with a background in a general field of subject matter which contains the specific subject they teach as well as closely related subjects. For example, a teacher of physics, a specific subject, also receives training in the more general field of science. As illustrated in Table 7, more variation has occurred in the preparation in the general field of the main subject taught.

Table 7

PREPARATION IN GENERAL FIELD OF MAIN SUBJECT TAUGHT

Quarter Hours	<u>Questioned Teachers</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
100 or more	24	17.0	71	15.1
90 - 99	2	1.4	33	7.0
80 - 89	8	5.7	39	8.3
70 - 79	17	12.1	57	12.1
60 - 69	15	10.6	60	12.8
50 - 59	12	8.5	50	10.6
40 - 49	13	9.2	41	8.7
30 - 39	13	9.2	34	7.2
20 - 29	10	7.1	35	7.4
10 - 19	11	7.8	23	4.8
0 - 9	16	11.3	27	5.7
	<u>141</u>		<u>470</u>	

Many of these teachers also taught a second subject. Table 8 shows the distribution among the different subject areas.

Table 8
SECOND SUBJECT TAUGHT

General Area	<u>Questioned Teachers</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Language arts	23	19.2	65	20.4
Social studies	10	8.3	47	14.7
Mathematics	12	10.0	39	12.2
Science	12	10.0	27	8.5
Foreign language	7	5.8	16	5.0
Business education	6	5.0	12	3.8
Practical arts, health, P. E.	20	16.7	35	11.0
Vocational education	17	14.2	28	8.8
Fine arts and special education	8	6.7	26	8.2
Non-teaching	5	4.2	24	7.5
	<u>120</u>		<u>319</u>	

As in the main subject taught, a good percentage of these teachers are in the ordinary "solid" subjects of language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science. But one difference is the rather large proportion of "questioned" teachers with vocational education as a second subject taught.

Of this second subject, a good percentage of teachers teach one, two or three sections, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9
NUMBER OF SECTIONS TAUGHT OF SECOND SUBJECT

No. of Sections	<u>Questioned Teachers</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	1	0.9	6	1.9
1	58	49.6	147	46.4
2	37	31.6	94	29.7
3	13	11.1	38	12.0
4	7	6.0	26	8.2
5	1	0.9	5	1.6
6	0	---	1	0.3
7	0	---	0	---
8	0	---	0	---
9	0	---	0	---
	117		317	

As shown in Table 10, most of the teachers were prepared with less than 40 quarter hours of preparation in this second subject.

Table 10
PREPARATION IN SECOND SUBJECT TAUGHT

Quarter Hours	<u>Questioned Teachers</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
100 or more	6	5.2	11	3.6
90 - 99	3	2.6	15	4.9
80 - 89	6	5.2	12	3.9
70 - 79	7	6.1	23	7.5
60 - 69	8	7.0	32	10.4
50 - 59	8	7.0	23	7.5
40 - 49	9	7.8	29	9.4
30 - 39	12	10.4	29	9.4
20 - 29	10	8.7	30	9.8
10 - 19	19	16.5	57	18.6
0 - 9	27	23.5	46	15.0
	115		307	

Table 11
PREPARATION IN GENERAL FIELD OF SECOND SUBJECT TAUGHT

Quarter Hours	<u>Questioned Teachers</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
100 or more	18	15.8	57	18.6
90 - 99	4	3.5	26	8.5
80 - 89	5	4.4	20	6.5
70 - 79	14	12.3	37	12.1
60 - 69	12	10.5	35	11.4
50 - 59	12	10.5	32	10.4
40 - 49	15	13.2	26	8.5
30 - 39	9	7.9	22	7.2
20 - 29	10	8.8	20	6.5
10 - 19	6	5.3	16	5.2
0 - 9	9	7.9	16	5.2
	114		307	

In the general field of the second subject, the preparation is much more variable, with some teachers having 100 or more quarter hours of preparation.

These findings suggest the recommendations that follow.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The reader should keep in mind that the purpose of this project was to study the assignments of Oregon secondary school teachers for 1966-67 to determine whether their assignments are in accord with their preparation. The answer, according to all the findings reported here, is that for the most part their assignments are in accord with their preparation. Whether the number of misassignments is sufficiently small must be the decision of their profession. The enormity of the study and the difficulty in conducting the study led the writer to make several recommendations. These follow below without comment, since they have been alluded to in the text:

- (1) A more standardized definition of teacher preparation should be adopted by all members of the education profession in Oregon.
- (2) A uniform and usable (i.e., punched card form) record-keeping system on teacher preparation should be adopted.
- (3) The profession itself should decide whether misassignment is really a problem instead of an arm-chair issue.
- (4) A larger study which engages and involves the major source of data about misassignment--the teachers--should be conducted.